

Nadler Declares Necessity for Investment in High Speed Rail in Northeast, Welcomes House T & I Committee to NYC

Thursday, 27 January 2011

NEW YORK, NY - Today, Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), the senior Democrat from the Northeast on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, reaffirmed the need for High Speed Rail in the Northeast Corridor and for public investment to make it possible. Nadler welcomed Chairman John Mica (R-FL) and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee - in its first hearing of the new Congress - to New York City for a special field hearing on High Speed Rail in the region. In a twist of infrastructural irony, Members of the Committee opted yesterday to take Amtrak from Washington to New York for the hearing; had they chosen other means, the snow storm would most likely have forced them to cancel the field hearing.

"I am very pleased to welcome the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to New York City as we explore the vital question of how to expand high speed rail in the Northeast," said Nadler. "True High Speed Rail is absolutely essential for the economic viability and competitiveness of New York and the region, and it's time we caught up with so many of our European and Asian counterparts. The idea that the private sector will somehow step in and fill the void seems to be more of a wish than a reality at this point…. The fact is that every major transportation system has been created with federally-funded capital investments. Every mode of transportation - highways, transit, aviation - relies on some form of public subsidy. Why should rail be any different?"

Nadler submitted the following statement:

"Thank you, Chairman Mica, and Ranking Member Rahall, for holding this hearing today on High Speed Rail in the Northeast Corridor. I'd like to welcome everybody to New York, and thank everyone for taking such an interest in passenger rail which is so vital to this city and to this region. Nobody relies on the Northeast Corridor more than me. I take the Acela virtually every week from my district to Washington. Even though the trip time is a little longer than the plane, it is consistently a more reliable and manageable way to travel.

"Chairman Mica and I have had several conversations over the years on this topic, and we both agree that we should work to achieve true High Speed Rail on the Northeast Corridor. It simply makes no sense to travel by air between New York and D.C. or Boston, or frankly between any cities within a 500 mile radius. As many of us know from personal experience, LaGuardia Airport, and many others in large metropolitan areas, are at capacity or constrained by existing development. High Speed Rail can provide competitive trip times and fares, freeing up space in our airports, while also benefiting our environment, economy, and national security. The benefits of High Speed Rail are clear. However, building such rail lines will take a significant investment.

"That is why I, and many of my colleagues, supported the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA), and have supported funding for High Speed Rail development and for Amtrak. Under the Bush Administration there was an effort to starve Amtrak to bankrupt it. In the last couple of years, we have finally started to dig out of that hole and invest in the corridor. Amtrak received \$1.3 billion in the Recovery Act and another \$700 million for Northeast upgrades. This investment is long overdue and a step in the right direction. If we want to improve service on the Northeast Corridor we should continue investing in it.

"I'm concerned by the proposal from my friends on the other side of the aisle to reduce federal funding to at least 2008 levels. There was no High Speed Rail program in 2008, so does that mean they want to eliminate this funding completely? The Republican Study Committee (RSC) certainly wants to, and has specifically called for the elimination of Amtrak and of intercity and High Speed Rail grants.

"The idea that the private sector will somehow step in and fill the void seems to be more of a wish than a reality at this point. I am happy to review proposals, but the DOT-solicited proposals for private development of High Speed Rail

and received none for the Northeast Corridor. And proposals I've heard about anecdotally still require some form of backing from the federal government.

"The fact is that every major transportation system has been created with federally-funded capital investments. Every mode of transportation - highways, transit, aviation - relies on some form of public subsidy. Why should rail be any different?

"I wish that Amtrak was testifying today, because it actually has a plan for 'Next Gen' High Speed Rail in the Northeast. Under Amtrak's plan, trains would reach speeds up to 220 miles per hour and provide a trip time of 1 hour 36 minutes between New York City and D.C., and of 1 hour 23 minutes between New York City and Boston. It would cost \$117 billion over 30 years, or about \$4 billion per year. To put this in perspective, we just spent twice that amount, \$8 billion, on High Speed Rail grants in the Recovery Act. And, in FY10 alone, we spent about \$70 billion on highways, transit and aviation. Spending \$4 billion a year to develop High Speed Rail would represent only about 5% of our entire transportation budget, and would be well worth the money considering it would create 44,000 jobs annually over the construction period, 120,000 permanent jobs, and generate an operating surplus of \$900 million per year. Not to mention that Amtrak's plan could be implemented without completely disrupting the current service.

"I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today, but I am very concerned that as we explore private financing we don't use it as an excuse to eliminate federal investment in passenger rail. Chairman Mica, I'm sure we will have many more discussions this year about the Northeast Corridor. I look forward to continue working with you on our shared goal of developing true High Speed Rail."

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